

Vice President Richard B. Cheney gave the following speech on the continuing war on terror, including remarks on Operation Iraqi Freedom, at the American Enterprise Institute on July 24, 2003.

REMARKS BY THE VICE PRESIDENT ON THE CONTINUING WAR ON TERROR

Good morning. Please. Thank you very much, and good afternoon to all of you. It's a pleasure to be back at AEI, where I spent a considerable period of time, and among so many friends. AEI, of course, is home to some of our nation's most distinguished scholars – one of whom also serves as the scholar in residence at the Naval Observatory. (Laughter.) If you think Lynne gives good lectures here, you should stop over at our house sometime. (Laughter.)

But I do want to thank Danielle Pletka for her introduction this afternoon, and I want to thank all of you for being here. And I bring good wishes to all of you from President Bush, who spoke to your annual dinner in February. In his remarks that evening, the President said that the United States “must look at security in a new way, because our country is a battlefield in the first war of the 21st century”. For the last 22 months, the United States has been fighting this war across the globe. We have seen many challenges, and many victories. Those victories have come exactly as President Bush said they would – sometimes in pitched battle; sometimes in the stealth of special operations; sometimes in sudden, decisive strikes—like the one witnessed two days ago by the late Uday and Qusay Hussein.

This worldwide campaign began after the attacks of September 11th, 2001, a watershed event in the history of our nation. We lost more people that morning than were lost at Pearl Harbor. And this was the merest glimpse of the violence terrorists are willing to inflict on this country. They desire to kill as many Americans as possible, with the most destructive weapons they can obtain. They target the innocent as a means of spreading chaos and fear, and to shake our national resolve. This enemy holds no territory, defends no population, is unconstrained by rules of warfare, and respects no law of morality. Such an enemy cannot be deterred, contained, appeased, or negotiated with. It can only be destroyed, and that's the business at hand.

For decades, terrorists have attacked Americans – and we remember every act of murder, including 17 Americans killed in 1983 by a truck bomb at our embassy in Beirut; and 241 servicemen murdered in their sleep in Beirut; an elderly man in a wheelchair, shot and thrown into the Mediterranean; a sailor executed in a hijacking; two of our soldiers slain in Berlin; a Marine lieutenant colonel kidnapped and murdered in Lebanon; 189 Americans killed on a PanAm flight over Scotland; six people killed at the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; 19 military personnel killed at the Khobar Towers; 12

Americans killed at our embassies in East Africa; 17 sailors murdered on the USS Cole; and an American diplomat shot dead in Jordan last year.

All of these were terrible acts that still cause terrible grief. Yet September 11th signaled the arrival of an entirely different era. We suffered massive civilian casualties on our soil. We awakened to dangers even more lethal – the possibility that terrorists could gain weapons of mass destruction from outlaw regimes and inflict catastrophic harm. And something else is different about this new era: Our response to terrorism has changed, because George W. Bush is President of the United States. For decades, terrorists have waged war against this country. Now, under the leadership of President Bush, America is waging war against them.

Our strategy in the war on terror is based on a clear understanding of the enemy, and a clear assessment of our national interest. Having lost thousands of Americans on a single morning, we are not going to answer further danger by simply issuing diplomatic protests or sharply worded condemnations. We will not wait in false comfort while terrorists plot against innocent Americans. We will not permit outlaw states and terror groups to join forces in a deadly alliance that could threaten the lives of millions of Americans. We will act, and act decisively, before gathering threats can inflict catastrophic harm on the American people.

From the first hour, we've known that the war on terror would be long and difficult. It would test our resolve, demand many sacrifices – above all, from the fine young men and women who defend this country.

The skill and courage of our military have brought a series of major successes in this war. With the best of allies at our side, America took the battle directly to the terrorists hiding in Afghanistan. The Afghan people have reclaimed their country from a depraved regime, and the violent rule of the Taliban has been ended forever.

America and our allies have continued the relentless pursuit of the global terror network. Of those directly involved in organizing the September 11th attacks, many are now in custody or confirmed dead. The leadership of al Qaeda has sustained heavy losses. We must recognize, however, that terrorism is a long-term challenge, and fighting terrorism will require a long-term commitment. The loose and decentralized networks of terrorism are still finding recruits, still plotting attacks. A hateful ideology, which defiles a great religion, has taken root in many parts of the world. Terrorists have conducted attacks since September 11th in Bali, Mombassa, Casablanca, and Riyadh. The terrorists intend to strike America again. Yet no one should doubt the intentions of our nation: One by one, in every corner of the world, we will hunt the terrorists down and destroy them.

In Iraq, we took another essential step in the war on terror. The United States and our allies rid the Iraqi people of a murderous dictator, and rid the world of a menace to our future peace and security.

Events leading to the fall of Saddam Hussein are fresh in memory, and do not need recounting at length. Every measure was taken to avoid a war. But it was Saddam Hussein himself who made war unavoidable. He had a lengthy history of reckless and sudden aggression. He bore a deep and bitter hatred for the United States. He cultivated ties to terrorist groups. He built, possessed, and used weapons of mass destruction. He refused all international demands to account for those weapons.

Twelve years of diplomacy, more than a dozen Security Council resolutions, hundreds of UN weapons inspectors, and even strikes against military targets in Iraq – all of these measures were tried to compel Saddam Hussein's compliance with the terms of the 1991 Gulf War cease-fire. All of these measures failed. Last October, the United States Congress voted overwhelmingly to authorize the use of force in Iraq. Last November, the UN Security Council passed a unanimous resolution finding Iraq in material breach of its obligations, and vowing serious consequences in the event Saddam Hussein did not fully and immediately comply. When Saddam Hussein failed even to comply then, President Bush, on March 17th, gave him and his sons 48 hours to leave Iraq. Saddam's decision to defy the world was among the last he made as the dictator of that country.

I have watched for more than a year now as President Bush kept the American people constantly informed of the dangers we face, and of his determination to confront those dangers. There was no need for anyone to speculate what the President was thinking; his words were clear, and straightforward, and understood by friend and enemy alike. When the moment arrived to make the tough call – when matters came to the point of choosing, and the safety of the American people was at stake – President Bush acted decisively, with resolve, and with courage.

Now the regime of Saddam Hussein is gone forever. And at a safe remove from the danger, some are now trying to cast doubt upon the decision to liberate Iraq. The ability to criticize is one of the great strengths of our democracy. But those who do so have an obligation to answer this question: How could any responsible leader have ignored the Iraqi threat?

Last October, the Director of Central Intelligence issued a National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's Continuing Programs of Weapons of Mass Destruction. That document contained the consensus judgments of the intelligence community, based upon the best information available about the Iraqi threat. The NIE declared—quote: “We judge that Iraq has continued its weapons of mass destruction program, in defiance of UN Resolutions and restrictions. Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons, as well as missiles with ranges in excess of UN restrictions. If left unchecked, it probably will have a nuclear weapon during this decade.” End quote.

Those charged with the security of this nation could not read such an assessment and pretend that it did not exist. Ignoring such information, or trying to wish it away, would be irresponsible in the extreme. And our President did not ignore that information – he faced it. He sought to eliminate the threat by peaceful, diplomatic means and, when all else failed, he acted forcefully to remove the danger.

Consider another passage from last October's National Intelligence Estimate; it reported—quote: “all key aspects – the R&D, production, and weaponization – of Iraq's offensive [biological weapons] program are active and that most elements are larger and more advanced than they were before the Gulf War.” End quote.

Remember, we were dealing here with a regime that had already killed thousands of people with chemical weapons. Against this background, to disregard the NIE's warnings would have been irresponsible in the extreme. And our President did not ignore that information – he faced it, and acted to remove the danger.

Take a third example. The NIE cautioned that quote: “Since inspections ended in 1998, Iraq has maintained its chemical weapons effort, energized its missile program, and invested more heavily in biological weapons; in the view of most agencies, Baghdad is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program.” End quote.

Here again, this warning could hardly be more blunt, or disturbing. To shrug off such a warning would have been irresponsible in the extreme. And so President Bush faced that information, and acted to remove the danger.

A fourth and final example. The National Intelligence Estimate contains a section that specifies the level of confidence that the intelligence community has in the various judgments included in the report. In the NIE on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, the community had “high confidence” in the conclusion that “Iraq is continuing, and in some areas expanding, its chemical, biological, nuclear and missile programs contrary to U.N. Resolutions.” The Intelligence Community also had high confidence in the judgment that – and I quote: “Iraq could make a nuclear weapon in months to a year once it acquires sufficient weapons-grade fissile material.” End quote.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is some of what we knew. Knowing these things, how could we, I ask, have allowed that threat to stand?

These judgments were not lightly arrived at – and all who were aware of them bore a heavy responsibility for the security of America. When the decision fell to him, President Bush was not willing to place the future of our security, and the lives of our citizens, at the mercy of Saddam Hussein. And so the President acted. As he said in the announcement of military action: “We will meet that threat now, with our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of firefighters and police and doctors on the streets of our own cities.”

Critics of the liberation of Iraq must also answer another question: what would that country look like today if we had failed to act? If we had not acted, Saddam Hussein and his sons would still be in power. If we had not acted, the torture chambers would still be in operation; the prison cells for children would still be filled; the mass graves would still be undiscovered; the terror network would still enjoy the support and protection of the regime; Iraq would still be making payments to the families of suicide bombers attacking Israel; and Saddam Hussein would still control vast wealth to spend on his chemical, biological, and nuclear ambitions.

All of these crimes and dangers were ended by decisive military action. Everyone, for many years, wished for these good outcomes. Finally, one man made the decision to achieve them: President George W. Bush. And the Iraqi people, the people of the Middle East, and the American people have a safer future because Saddam Hussein’s regime is history.

Having now liberated Iraq, the United States and our allies are determined to see all our commitments through. The leader of the Coalition Provisional Authority, Ambassador Paul Bremer, was at the White House yesterday and to brief us on the progress that the Coalition Provisional Authority is making. Nineteen nations now have provided more than 13,000 troops to help stabilize Iraq – and additional forces will soon arrive. In the relief and reconstruction effort we are renovating schools, and restoring basic services. Coalition authorities are training Iraqi police forces to help patrol Iraqi

cities and villages, and will soon establish a new civilian defense force. Iraq will also have its own new army – a military force that defends the Iraqi people instead of bullying and terrorizing them. A governing council of Iraqis, recognized by the United Nations, is now operating, naming ministers, and drawing up a budget for the country. All major cities in Iraq now have municipal councils. The process of drafting a constitution will soon be underway, and this will prepare the way eventually for elections.

We still have many tasks to complete in Iraq, and many dangers remain. There are still some holdouts of the regime, joined by terrorists from outside the country, who are fighting desperately to prevent progress of any kind for the Iraqi people. These killers are being systematically dealt with, as we saw in Mosul on Tuesday. That action also showed the great skill and bravery of our men and women serving in Iraq today. America is proud of all the men and women serving and sacrificing in this cause – and they will have all the resources they need to complete the vital work that we've asked them to do.

Our ongoing mission is not easy, but it is essential for our security and for the peace of the world. We will help the Iraqi people to build a free, sovereign, and democratic nation. That free nation will stand as an example to the entire Middle East, proving that freedom and the hope of peace have far more power and appeal than ideologies of hate and terror. And a more peaceful, stable Middle East will contribute directly to the security of America and our friends.

The United States of America has been called to hard tasks before. Earlier generations of Americans defeated fascism and won the long twilight struggle against communism. Our generation has been given the task of defeating the purveyors of terrorism, who are a direct threat to our liberty and our lives. We will use every element of our national power to destroy those who seek to do us harm. But, as in the past, we will do far more than merely defeat our enemies. In Afghanistan and Iraq and in other places where tyranny has been a fertile breeding ground for terror, we will help those who seek to build free, more tolerant, and more prosperous societies.

America's commitment and generosity in rebuilding ravaged lands in Europe and Asia was a hallmark of our foreign policy in the 20th century. It was a good investment for America then—it is just as wise now. We do this not only because it is right, but because it is essential to our own security, the security of our friends and allies, and to our eventual victory in the war against terrorism. Our soldiers serving so bravely in Iraq and Afghanistan today know they are ensuring a safer future for their own children and for all of us.

In the 22 months since that clear September morning when America was attacked, we have not lost focus, or been distracted, or wavered in the performance of our duties. We will not rest until we have overcome the threat of terror. We will not relent until we have assured the freedom and security of the American people.

Thank you. (Applause.)